



Fallen Feathers (from the Phoenix series)

Hilla Kurki

Opening: 15 September 2017, 6 – 9 pm

Exhibition: 16 September – 18 November 2017

In living a life there are very few guarantees, but experiencing loss is one emotional hurdle we all will face at some given point. How we handle it depends upon its nature, but the death of a loved one carries its own signature. It is a fundamental human experience that can bring solace for some and the loss of self for others. Rebecca Solnit once wrote, „to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like Arctic tundra or a sea of ice“ (*The Faraway Nearby*, 2013). This is the starting point in understanding Hilla Kurki's newest body of work *Fallen Feathers (from the Phoenix series)*.

It begins with her sister's death at the early age of 28 and how Kurki incorporates this personal tragedy into her own story, using her grief as stepping-stones towards a New Becoming. She transforms her sister's forgotten black dresses into a bridge to link us through to her memories in hope of self-recovery. Kurki's photographs have a familiar feel to Yoko Ono's early performances from the 1960s, where she sits upon a stage in a self-induced trance while members of the audience come forward to cut pieces from her clothing. In a similar fashion, we see Kurki in *Phoenix Piece* (2016), dressed in one of her sister's full-length designs, blankly staring into the camera. Slowly, over 36 individual frames she begins cutting from the bottom to the top in one continuous strip until, ultimately, she is naked. The photograph appears to be a documentation of a performance, however there is no audience apart from herself and her continuous inner dialogue. Kurki seeks another avenue, one that approaches self-recovery through her family's legacy of weaving.

The tradition of cutting clothes of the deceased to weft. What could not be used was remodelled, deconstructed and then reconstructed as a form of pragmatic exorcism. By cutting, sewing and weaving, Kurki works through all her sister's collected garments to reshape her personal story, to enable her to take back the authority to determine her own fate. In Kurki's own words she states, „Something is lost but something is reborn. It is a tender annihilation.“

What is essential in all of her works is the juxtaposition between the living body and the materiality of the textiles. These images portray a play within what we see and how it touches us. They set the stage where form meets the tactility of how it could feel. The dresses are symbolic vestiges, incomplete empty shells invoking the absence of presence. These compositions of Kurki's fall into the same shadow of Annika von Hauswolff's piece, *The memory of my mothers underwear transformed into a flameproof drape* (2003), in how they seem to loom over the viewer, remaining both softly aloof yet menacing at the same time.

Hilla Kurki has gradually learned that sorrow can be grown out of like a snake's skin can be shed. She states, „One cannot empty out an emotion just by feeling it. One can overcome it and learn to own it, by meticulously re-telling it“. This follows a long history of female artists who renegotiate the past through self-reflection and re-evaluation of their own families' relationships and how a profound experience can endlessly resonate. Like a stone cast into a pond we are left with just a ripple, reminding us of the impact.

Hilla Kurki was born in Anjalankoski, Finland, in 1985. She lives and works in Helsinki. Kurki is currently pursuing her Master studies at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Her recent exhibitions include *Landscape Transformed*, Myymälä2 (Helsinki, 2016), *Error*, Jukka Male Museum (Helsinki, 2016) and *Summer School*, The Finnish Museum of Photography (Helsinki, 2013).